

# Agenda Item 23.

<b>Development Management Ref No</b>	<b>No weeks on day of committee</b>	<b>Parish</b>	<b>Ward</b>	<b>Listed by:</b>
153382	32	Wokingham Town	Emmbrook	Major & Applicant is a councillor.

<b>Applicant</b>	Mr Mark Ashwell		
<b>Location</b>	Emmbrook Sports Pavilion, Lowther Road, Wokingham.	<b>Postcode</b>	RG41 1JB
<b>Proposal</b>	Full application for the proposed erection of a grandstand, pitch flood lighting, car park and artificial turf footpath.		
<b>Type</b>	Full		
<b>PS Category</b>	6		
<b>Officer</b>	Mark Croucher		

<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Planning Committee on 20 <sup>th</sup> July 2016
<b>REPORT PREPARED BY</b>	Head of Development Management and Regulatory Services

## SUMMARY

This planning application is to be decided by the committee because the proposal constitutes a major development and the applicant is a councillor. The application seeks the erection of a covered spectator stand, floodlights, car park, artificial turf footpath and railings. The proposed development all relates to upgrading the existing football pitch to Football Association Level Step 5 and will allow the first team to play in the Hellenic Premier League. The first team are currently in the league below (Hellenic Division 1 East) and there are no restrictions that prohibit the first team from using the Lowther Road pitch next season. The applicant has advised that the First XI football team will play home league and cup matches at the site next season.

The proposed development will not result in a material change of use of the land and will involve the improvement of local sports facilities and this is supported by the NPPF and development plan policies. In principle, as the site is located within a major development location, any intensification of the use of the site as a result of the development would be acceptable. The proposed development, in particular the floodlight columns will be prominent features within the immediate setting of the sports ground and there would be some harm to the character and appearance of the area. The Environmental Health Team has raised no objection to the proposed development and the use of the site will be controlled by conditions. The proposal would have an acceptable impact on highway safety and will be served by adequate levels of parking. The mature trees in the locality will be retained. The proposed development will have an acceptable impact with regard to ecology and drainage & flooding.

On balance, given that the site results in improved sports and leisure facilities, it is considered that the benefits of the proposed development will outweigh any harm and the application is accordingly recommended for approval subject to conditions.

## PLANNING STATUS

- Major Development Area
- Contaminated Land Consultation Zone.
- Flood Zone 1

## RECOMMENDATION

APPROVAL, subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: In pursuance of s.91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended by s.51 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004).

2. This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered 15676 – 01, 15676 – 02 and 15676 – 03 – Rev B. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.

3. Prior to the commencement of development, a plan showing the root protection areas of nearby trees and the location of tree protective fencing shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed details shall be fully implemented and retained in situ for the duration of the development. No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within an area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To secure the protection throughout the time that the development is being carried out of trees shrubs or hedges growing within or adjacent to the site which are of amenity value to the area, and to allow for verification by the local planning authority that the necessary measures are in place before development and other works commence Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and [Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21.

4. Prior to the commence of development hereby approved, a parking layout should be submitted to Local Planning Authority depicting at least 5 disabled, and at least 2 motor cycles parking bays. Details shall also be provided on cycle stands to provide for at least 11 cycles. The approved details shall be implemented fully unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to ensure acceptable parking facilities are provided so as to encourage the use of sustainable modes of travel. Relevant policy: NPPF Section 4 (Sustainable Transport) and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.

5. The hard surfacing for the parking area hereby permitted shall be constructed from porous materials such as a protecta mesh, grascrete or other similar material unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: to ensure to additional water run-off will occur onto the public highway

as a result of the development.

6. Prior to the commencement of development a Noise Management Plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved details shall be fully implemented unless otherwise first agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.
7. Reason: To protect the amenity of neighbouring residents. The floodlights hereby approved shall not be turned on at any time after 7pm on Saturdays and at no time on Sundays.

The floodlights hereby approved shall not be turned on anytime Monday to Friday apart from 20 midweek days per year for competitive matches until 10pm.

Any variation from the permitted hours of illumination shall be first applied to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To preserve the amenity of neighbouring residents, the character of the area and the wellbeing of bats.

8. The lighting hereby approved shall not exceed the Lux levels as stated in the document submitted by Thorn Lighting Limited dated: 24/03/2015 unless otherwise first approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenity of neighbouring residents and character and appearance of the area.

9. Prior to the commencement of development details of the waste and refuse arrangements shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The details hereby agreed shall be fully implemented unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To protect the amenity of the area.

10. The site shall not be used for any competitive league fixtures above the current Hellenic Premier League (or equivalent league) unless otherwise first agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the use of the site does harm the local amenity and does not cause detrimental traffic impacts.

**Informatives:**

1. The applicant is reminded that this approval is granted subject to conditions which must be complied with prior to the development starting on site. Commencement of the development without complying with the pre-commencement requirements may be outside the terms of this permission and liable to enforcement action. The information required should be formally submitted to the Council for consideration with the relevant fee. Once the details have been approved in writing the development should be carried out only in accordance with those details. If this is not clear please contact the case officer

to discuss.

2. Should any great crested newts or evidence of great crested newts be found prior to or during the development, all works must stop immediately and an ecological consultant contacted for further advice and Wokingham Borough Council informed before works can proceed. All contractors working on site should be made aware of the advice and provided with the contact details of a relevant ecological consultant.
3. As the proposed site is adjacent to Network Rail's operational railway infrastructure, Network Rail will require the developer to sign an Asset Protection Agreement with Network Rail's Asset Protection team at [AssetProtectionWessex@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:AssetProtectionWessex@networkrail.co.uk) prior to any works commencing on site.
  - The applicant must adhere to the Network Rail guidance relating to recreational areas.
  - The area along the Network Rail boundary and sports field is lined with trees and it is essential that the 18m high flood lights do not impose any risks to driver sighting. As such the applicant must undertake a glare assessment and submit the report for Network Rail's Asset Protection acceptance.
  - The applicant must carry out a risk assessment to ensure the correct fencing is used and should consider the erection of higher screening.
  - The applicant should carry out a risk assessment to determine the risk of trespassing. The existing Network Rail boundary fence may need to be enhanced/strengthened.
  - The applicant must submit a Risk Assessment and Method Statement (RAMS) /lifting plan for the erection of the columns for flood lights along the Network Rail boundary fence.
  - The applicant must submit a RAMS for all construction activity along the Network Rail boundary including the erection of the 1.1m high pitch barrier, the 1.85m or higher solid timber fencing to the boundary and a RAMS for erecting the proposed 20.73m x 3m grandstand.

## PLANNING HISTORY

F/2004/2653 - Proposed dugouts for Wokingham Football Club - Approved 17/12/2004.

F/2010/1068 - Proposed erection of boundary fencing (including front gate) on three sides of boundary of site – Approved 04/08/2010.

## SUMMARY INFORMATION

Site Area	2.52 hectares
Previous land use(s) and floorspace(s)	Outdoor sports ground (Use Class D2)
Number of jobs created/lost	None specified
Existing parking spaces	50

## CONSULTATION RESPONSES

### Wokingham Town Council – Objection:

- The floodlighting and additional traffic generated by the proposal represents a scale of activity that is inappropriate to the character of a residential area and detrimental to the amenities of adjoining land users and as such does not comply with policy CP3 of the adopted Core Strategy.
- It has not been demonstrated that the noise impact of the proposed development has been assessed as required by policy CC06 of the adopted MDD Local Plan.

### Winnersh Parish Council – No Objection:

- The committee requests a restriction defining the latest time in the evening the floodlights can be used.

**Environmental Health** – No objection subject to conditions 6.

**Highways** – No objection subject to conditions 4.

**Ecologist** – Objection: Mitigation measures should be incorporated to reduce the impact on bats.

**Network Rail** – No objection.

## REPRESENTATIONS

### 35 letters of objection points raised (in summary):

- The plans will not cater for the amount of cars (70) suggested.
- The entrance is not suitable for the number of vehicle movements proposed.
- Light pollution from the floodlights.
- The application does not meet the Equality Act of 2010.
- The application does not meet the guidance in 'Accessible Stadia' published by the Sports Ground Safety Authority.
- The application is not appropriate for the site.
- Increase in on street parking which will cause an obstruction.
- The proposed parking will not be sufficient.
- The access is narrow and on a busy corner, increasing the risk of accidents.
- Noise and disturbance to local residents due to the use of the site at later times under the flood lights.
- The floodlights should be restricted to 8pm.
- The floodlights will be obtrusive and will affect living conditions.
- The floodlights will be a distraction for motorist and the adjacent train line.
- The floodlight will waste energy and contribute towards global warming.
- The development will have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- The deed on the site states that it should be used for amateur sports however the application will focus on one sport only, to the detrimental of other activities.
- The club can play at alternative premises.

- The residential area will not cope with development of this scale.
- The majority of people who use the club are not local.
- The traffic is a danger to pedestrians.
- The development is not permissible under the terms of the lease.
- The site was given to the residents of Emmbrook as a Deed of Gift for amateur use, not semi-professional teams.
- A large number of the support letters are from members of the Emmbrook Sports and Social Club who do not live near the site.
- The site is currently not maintained to control planting along the boundaries and rubbish isn't cleared up. The proposed development will exacerbate these problems.
- The parking should be managed by stewards.
- The stand will be large and unsightly.
- Additional water runoff from the development will increase the risk of flooding.
- Bats will be affected by the floodlights.
- More amateur teams will be displaced as a result of the development.
- Overlooking.
- The stand will attract antisocial behaviour.
- The facilities have attractive noise, vandalism and anti-social behaviour and the proposed development exacerbate these issues.
- The site is a valuable green space.
- The current trees on the site are not managed.
- There should be adequate toilet facilities.
- The development will impact the privacy of the residents.
- The pitch is liable to flooding and is not suitable for the level of football intended to be played on the site.
- Does not agree with the statement that the overall usage will not increase.
- The overall floodlight usage during evenings from October to March will increase dramatically (from nil to 20 matches plus say 40 training nights) with the corresponding unacceptable noise and light pollution. This is unacceptable for a residential area.
- Allowing the football club to take over the site will prohibit local residents from using the land.
- An entrance fee would be charged for matches.
- The flood lights are twice as high as the houses.
- The transport demand will increase significantly.
- The application is made by a local councillor.
- The club isn't amateur and therefore does not comply with the lease.
- The car park will be close to the children's play area.
- Health and safety concerns.
- The applicant has not received written consent from the landlord.
- Increase in noise.
- No details stating what will happen if the site is abandoned.
- The club will require a fence around the site to meet the F.A Standards.
- A P.A system will be required and this will result in additional noise.
- Pay boxes or turnstiles will be required at the entrance.

**69 letters of support** points raised (in summary):

- The development will allow local individuals to participate in sport without needing to travel outside of the borough.

- Positive contribution to the area.
- It will be a good community facility.
- The development will give local children access to sports facilities.
- Wokingham has poor playing facilities and the development will improve these.
- Football and cricket has been played at the site for many years.
- Wokingham is an affluent area and deserves a good football team.
- It's important to improve the facilities within the area as the town grows.
- It will be a community hub.
- The first team are currently ground sharing with Henley and this is damaging the club.
- It will bring in revenue to the local area.
- The club have been supportive in developing local sports teams.
- The development will allow a good standard of ladies football to be hosted on the site.
- New housing development will put existing facilities under pressure and the proposal will help to contribute to the sports provision in the area.
- The parking spaces will tidy up the area.
- The development is necessary.
- It will keep local adults and children healthy.

#### **APPLICANTS POINTS**

- The first team will play home and cup matches at the ground next season regardless of the outcome of this application. This should be considered as the "fall-back" position.
- There will be no intensification of the use of the site.
- The application is to formalise the existing car parking requirement with no intensification of usage - the level of activity throughout our week will remain the same and not increase in any way as a result of this planning application. In fact the proposal will enable parking on site during the winter months alleviating any parking nuisance on the adjacent highway.
- There are no alternative sites available.
- The club is a well-run community facility.
- It will improve access for the community to good quality sporting facilities.
- This is the local football team and they should play within Wokingham Borough.
- There is no intention to develop the site further beyond the current proposal.

#### **PLANNING POLICY**

NPPF	Chapter 1: Building strong & competitive economies Chapter 4: Promoting sustainable transport Chapter 7: Requiring good design Chapter 8: Promoting healthy communities Chapter 10: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change Chapter 11: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment
Core Strategy	CP1 Sustainable Development CP2 Inclusive communities CP3 General Principles for Development CP6 Managing travel demand CP7 Biodiversity CP9 Scale and location of development proposals

MDD Local Plan	CC01 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 Development Limits CC03 Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC06 Noise CC07 Parking CC09 Development and Flood Risk (from all sources) CC10 Sustainable Drainage TB21 Landscape Character TB23 Biodiversity and Development
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## PLANNING ISSUES

### Principle of development

1. The application site is in a Major Development Location where the principle of sustainable development is acceptable.
2. Part 8 (Promoting Healthy Communities) of the NPPF promotes access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation as this makes an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states it is important that proposals recognise and enhance the value of open spaces to contribute to the needs of the borough.
3. The authorised use of the site is outdoor sports pitches (Use Class D2) and the proposed application will not result in a material change of use of the land. Emmbrook Sports and Social Club lease the site from Wokingham Borough Council and this expires in 2037. The contents of the lease give no public right of access over or onto the land and the use of the site by the general public is at the discretion of the club. Due to the contents of the lease, it cannot be considered that the proposed development will result in the loss of open public amenity space. The application is for the proposed operational development only: this will improve the current sports facilities on the site and is supported by the NPPF and the development plan policies.
4. The proposed development will result in social benefits by improving the facilities of a local sports club. This *social* consideration does however need to be weighed against the impacts on the neighbouring residents and this is set out in further detail in the '*Impact on Neighbours*' section of this report. The club will also benefit economically as it would not be financially burdened by paying to use other facilities outside of the borough.
5. To summarise, the site is within the settlements limits of Wokingham which is a Major Development Location where larger scale developments are encouraged due to sustainability of the area. The proposal will improve local sports facilities and this is supported by the NPPF and the development plan policies. There will be no material change of use of the land and the proposal will not result in a loss of public open space. It is therefore considered that the principle of development is acceptable subject to the other material considerations set out in this report.

## **Intensity of use**

6. The issue arises that whilst no material change of use will occur, the operational development could facilitate a more intensive use of the site. It must therefore be considered whether the intensity of the potential use would have materially harmful impacts. The probable intensity of the use of the site is set out in this section in-order to lay the foundation for the assessment in the other chapters of the report. It needs to be established how the site can currently be used without planning permission and how the proposed development is likely to alter the intensity of use over and above this fall-back position.
7. Whilst the site is not currently used by the first team for competitive matches, it has been advised that they have been relegated from the Hellenic Premier League into Hellenic Division 1 East. Lowther Road has been accepted for Hellenic Division 1 East football and the first team will be playing at the site next season. The first team have been using grounds at Henley and Bracknell in the past. This is the fall-back position that has to be taken into consideration.
8. To establish the potential use of the site, it has been advised that the proposed facilities would not allow the club to progress any further than the Hellenic Premier League due to additional F.A requirements that would have to be met for higher leagues. This would therefore be a top threshold for the potential use of the site as a result of the proposed development.
9. The term 'intensity of use' can be abstract but in the context of this application it has been broadly broken down into four key elements:
  - Visitors – The number of people visiting the site (spectators, players, officials...)
  - Time – The number of days used; the amount hours used each day; and whether the hours of use would be in the morning, day, evening or night.
  - Activity – The type of activity occurring.
  - Development – The operational development on the land.

### ***Visitors***

10. Considering whether the development will attract additional visitors, the fall-back position of the first team playing competitive matches at the site next season, regardless of the outcome of this application, is a material consideration. The club has provided statistics of the number of spectators watching the first team over the last decade. The average attendance per game was 77.5 and this has not varied substantially from season to season. When the club was in the Hellenic Premier League the average attendance was 78 spectators per game. This is not materially different from when the club has competed in the lower Hellenic Division 1 East. It can therefore be reasonably deduced that there would not be a significant increase in attendances from the existing fall-back position if the first team are promoted in the future. The applicant has also suggested that the use of the site for first team matches wouldn't be too different in visitor numbers from the level of visitors all the junior teams that play on the site attract (players, parents,

spectators and officials).

11. The provision of the stand at Lowther Road would make watching the first team more comfortable for spectators but it is not considered that this in itself would result in a substantial increase in the attendance of home games.
12. It is considered that the greater area of the ground illuminated will allow for larger training sessions and more teams to train at the site at any one time than the current low level flood lights. Therefore more participants could visit the site at any one time for training sessions as a result of the development. The floodlights are only intended to illuminate the pitch and the potential to use the pitch for training will be limited due to the requirement of preserving the main football pitch for the club.

### ***Time***

13. Moving on to consider the *time* aspect of the intensity of use. There are no current restrictions prohibiting the times of the day the sports ground can be used. The addition of the floodlights will allow the football pitch to be used outside of normal daylight hours for competitive games and this will be particularly appreciable in winter months. The site has some existing low level flood lights along the south east and south west boundaries and it has been advised that these are currently used for training sessions but are not adequate to facilitate competitive games. The existing low level floodlights on the site are not restricted by planning conditions. It is therefore considered that the proposed floodlights would not extend the times that the site can be used for training sessions. It is however acknowledged in the preceding paragraph that the flood lights have the potential for more training sessions to occur on the site at any one time and could attract a greater number of visitors.
14. The club intends to use the floodlights no later than 7 pm on Saturdays and 10 pm for midweek matches. The club proposes that there will be a maximum of 20 floodlit midweek games per annum, which is relatively few considering there are 260 'midweek' days in a calendar year. The proposed development will therefore allow the site to be used for competitive matches at later times.

### ***Activity***

15. The type of activity the proposed development will facilitate could affect the 'intensity' of the use of the site. As aforementioned, the proposed first team will play on the site next season regardless of the outcome of this application and this is the fall-back position. The proposed development will however allow the first team to play on the site should they get promoted back into the Hellenic Premier League. It is not considered that entering a higher league will result in a significant change in the type of activity occurring on the site. The site will be used as outdoor sports pitch (falling within a D2 use class) for a local amateur sport team.
16. Whilst it would be logical to assume playing in a higher league would attract a greater number of spectators, the statistics show that there was no material difference in average attendances from when the first team played in the

Hellenic Premier League and Hellenic Division 1 East. The improvement of the flooding lights on the site will also allow for larger areas of the sports ground to be used for training sessions outside normal daylight hours and this could change the nature of the activity occurring on the site.

### ***Development***

17. It is reasonable to assume that an increase in the amount of development on a site can result in a perceived intensification of the use of the land. The most prominent works will be the proposed flood lights and the stand. It is therefore considered that there would be a perceived intensification of the use of the site by reason of the additional built form on the land. This impact is considered in further detail in the '*Design and impact on character and appearance of the area*' section of this report.
18. In summary, referring to the key elements that contribute to an intensity of use (*visitors, time, activity and development*), there would be some intensification of the use of the site from the lawful and likely fall-back position. It is considered that there would not be a significant increase in visitors for competitive games as a result of the development, based on the attendance statistics submitted. There could be some increase in individuals attending the site for training sessions under the flood lights. There would be an increase in the potential hours the site can be used for competitive games due to the proposed flood lights. The type of activity occurring at the site would not materially change as a result of the development. The increase in development on the site would result in a perception of increased activity.

### **Design and impact on character and appearance of the area**

19. Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that '*maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment*'. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states planning permission will be granted if development is '*of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life*'.
20. The application seeks the erection of a covered stand, flood lights, car park facility, barriers around the pitch and a footpath.
21. The proposed development includes the erection of a stand with a total capacity for 200 spectators (100 seating & 100 standing). The stand will be approximately 3 metres high and 21 metres wide. It will be located towards the southern corner of the site which is partially screened to the south west by a railway line with planting along the boundary and a belt of mature trees to the south east. A row of trees and planting along Old Forest Road will intermittently screen the stand from views to the north. The eastern part of the site is visually open and the stand will be visible from views along this section of Lowther Road. The stand will be relatively low and the profile will not break the skyline. Given the size and siting of the proposed stand, it is considered that the visual impact of this feature will be contained within the site.

22. It is proposed to erect 5 flood lighting columns around the football pitch. 3 will be 14 metres in height and 2 will be 18 metres in height. The 3 floodlights to the south of the pitch will be 14 metres high and will be set amongst the back drop of the mature trees along the southern boundary. The 2 floodlights to the north of the pitch will be located at the corners and will be 18 metres in height. The layout of the lighting columns has been designed so that the cricket pitch is not affected. The two lighting columns to the north are higher so that the illumination spread covers the relevant sections of the football pitch without the requirement for a central floodlight that would obstruct the cricket pitch. The floodlight nearest the railway track will be partially set amongst a backdrop of trees and planting. Notwithstanding this, the lighting column will breach the horizon. The other 18 metre high floodlight located at the Lowther Road corner of the pitch will have limited visual screening: it will be a prominent feature from the public realm.
23. The proposed footpath from the clubhouse around the site will be finished with artificial turf and it is considered that this feature will have negligible visual impact. The proposed carpark is intended to be surfaced with mesh material that will allow grass to grow in between the gaps, minimising the visual impact of this part of the proposal. Cars currently park along the surrounding roads and informally on the eastern part of the site. The provision of an additional formal car parking facility will have the benefit of rationalising the current informal parking arrangements and reducing the associated visual impact of on road parking.
24. The proposed development, particularly the floodlights will impact the character and appearance of the area. The site is within a Major Development Location in the defined settlement limits of Wokingham where major development is broadly directed to. The area has no special designation and floodlit sports pitches are not uncommon facilities within defined settlement boundaries and even in countryside locations. On balance, it is considered that there would be some harm on the character and appearance of the area as a result of the development.

### **Impact on Neighbours**

25. As aforementioned, the football pitch is in situ and can be used by the first XI football team regardless of this application. It is considered that the proposed development will not result in a significant increase in the number of spectators watching the first team.
26. The proposed floodlights are intended to facilitate 20 midweek competitive games per year up until 10pm. The pitch cannot be used for evening games in winter months and therefore the proposed use will introduce more noise and disturbance during the proposed midweek games. The proposed number of midweek games will result in relatively few occurrences throughout the year. The World Health Organisation guidance 'Night Noise Guidelines for Europe' states that the night is usually eight hours between 23.00 – 7.00. The pitch is proposed to be used until 10pm which is outside of the above definition of night-time. The Environmental Health Team has considered the application and has not raised any objection regarding noise and disturbance

as a result of the proposed development.

27. The proposed floodlights will be directed towards the football pitch and Information has been submitted depicting the light spill. The Environmental Health Team has considered this information and advised that there will be minimal light overspill as a result of the proposed floodlights.
28. The proposed development will not result in any detrimental loss of light, loss of privacy or overbearing impact to the neighbouring residents.
29. It is considered that relative to the existing and 'fall-back' position, the proposed development will not have a significant impact on the amenity of the occupiers of the neighbouring properties subject to conditions to restrict the intensity of use and hours of operation (condition 7).

### **Highways and parking**

30. The applicant has reasoned that there would be no increase in the intensity of the use of the site due to the current use of the pitches. Whilst the report considers that there will be some increase in the intensity of the usage of the site, this is not considered to be substantially over and above the 'fall-back' position.
31. The access to the site is in situ and it is considered that this will continue to be used. It has been advised that the parking capacity on the site will increase from 50 to 70. There is an existing parking area near the clubhouse and land adjacent to the site entrance is formally used for informal parking. The intention is to formalise this informal parking area by laying Protecta Mesh and extending it. Protecta Mesh is a heavy duty, slip resistant polyethylene grid that has an open, wavy structure, allowing grass to grow through and water to drain away whilst providing a stable structure for vehicles and pedestrians. In doing this, it is hoped that the parking on site can be used more consistently, especially in times of poor weather when the existing informal space is not suitable for car parking, thus reducing pressure on on-street parking.
32. The application site is within a sustainable location in the defined settlement limits of Wokingham and is close to the A329 (Reading Road) which has good public transport links.
33. The Highway Engineer has considered the proposed development and raises no objection regarding highway safety subject to condition 4.

### **Trees and Landscaping**

34. Elements of the development are close to mature trees but none of the works would result in a significant incursion into the Root Protection Area (RPA) of the surrounding trees. It is considered that condition 7 is sufficient to ensure that no trees are detrimentally harmed as a result of the proposal.
35. The entrance is in situ and it is not proposed to remove any of the planting around the periphery of the site. It is considered that the proposed development will have a satisfactory impact on the existing trees.

### **Drainage and Flooding**

36. The application site is in Flood Zone 1 where there is a low risk of fluvial flooding. There are areas with a medium to low risk of surface water flooding along Lowther Road, Old Forest Road and at the entrance of the site. No substantial areas of hard surfacing are proposed and the carpark is to be constructed from a porous material. The access track and entrance are in situ. It is not considered that the proposed development will increase surface water run-off from the site or result in any other flooding implications.

### **Biodiversity and Ecology**

37. The site is within 500 metres of a known great crested newt breeding pond but it is considered that the scale and scope of the development makes it unlikely that this proposal would adversely affect the local great crested newt population. The Ecologist raises no objection subject to recommended informative 2.

38. The application site is immediately adjacent to the railway line and within 150m of three bat roosts that have been identified from other planning applications. Two of these applications back on to the railway line and it is suspected that this is their main commuting foraging route. Bats are a light sensitive species and some are known to avoid areas lit by artificial light. The ecologist has raised a concern regarding the impact of the lighting on bats. The critical time for bats being affect by artificial light is from May to August as they are less active in winter months.

39. The hours of illumination, the type of light and the level of baffling can mitigate the impact on light sensitive species. The most active period for bats (May – August) mainly falls outside of the football season. The proposed use of the floodlights for competitive games would not be frequent (see condition 7) or extend significantly into the night time. Given the frequency of use, it is not considered that the proposed development would have a detrimental impact on the local bat population.

### **Other Matters**

40. Reference has been made in neighbour objection letters to a variety of issues that are considered below.

41. It has been outlined that the site was given as a Deed of Gift to the local community. Any covenant on the site is a civil matter between the relevant parties and the outcome of this application does not override any legal restrictions separately imposed on the land. This is not a material consideration.

42. Objection letters have raised a concern that the lease to the club states an obligation to provide a variety of amateur sporting activities on the site. The lease agreement between Wokingham Borough Council and the lease holder is also separate matter and this planning application would not override any restriction imposed by the lease. Notwithstanding this, the club has confirmed that it does not pay its first team players and is therefore an amateur sports

team. The proposed development will still maintain the use of the site for cricket and will not prohibit any of the sporting activities that currently occur on the land.

43. Objection letters have raised concerns regarding disabled access onto the site. The proposed development around the pitch will improve access for disabled persons due to the hard surface. In addition, condition 4 secures the provision of disabled parking bays in a formal layout to the car park.
44. Objections have been raised relating to an increase in rubbish on the site. Condition 9 is recommended to ensure that rubbish bins are provided.
45. The sustainability of the site for the long term development of the football club has been raised. The applicant has advised that there is no intention for the first team to compete higher than the Hellenic Premier League. Additional development at the site would likely require the benefit of planning permission. In addition, condition 10 is recommended to ensure the site is not used more intensively for higher league football matches.
46. A concern has been raised regarding the energy consumption/efficiency of the floodlights. It is considered that the benefits of the scheme would outweigh the environmental impact. Furthermore the floodlights would only be turned on at specific times.
47. Objections have been raised regarding glare from the floodlights to motorists and train drivers. The applicant will have to enter into a separate agreement with Network Rail to ensure the floodlights do not impact driver visibility (see informative 3). The Highway Engineer has raised no objection regarding glare to motorists.
48. Objection letters have raised concerns over what would happen should the sports club vacate the site. On balance, the development is considered to be acceptable for the reasons set out in this report and there would be no detrimental impact should the site remain in situ once the proposed development is erected. The D2 use class of the site has not change and it will still bring about the social benefits of a local sports facility, even if the club move elsewhere. The site is leased by Wokingham Borough Council and this gives the Council control over the future of the land should the sports club vacate the site.
49. The erection of a proposed fence along the boundary of the site has been removed from the proposed development.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The proposed development will not result in a material change of use of the land and will involve the improvement of local sports facilities and this is supported by the development plan policies. The intensification of the use of the site as a result of the development would not be unacceptable in principle in a major development location. The proposed development, in particular the floodlight columns will be prominent features within the immediate setting of the sports ground and there would be some

harm to the character and appearance of the area. The Environmental Health Team has raised no objection to the proposed development and the use of the site will be controlled by conditions. The proposal would have an acceptable impact on highway safety and will be served by adequate levels of parking. The mature trees in the locality will be retained. The proposed development will have an acceptable impact with regard to ecology and drainage & flooding. On balance, given the improved level of sporting and leisure facilities, it is considered that the benefits of the proposed development will outweigh the impacts of the proposal and the application is accordingly recommended for approval subject to conditions.

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